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ABSTRACT

Language classroom activities fall into three categories: (1) citation, or samples, intended to exemplify the language system; (2) simulation; and (3) replication, activities with a definite nonlinguistic outcome, with communicative success or failure measured by the outcome, not by the language output itself. Instruction that relies primarily on citation and simulation activities regards learning as additive, predictable, and controlled, and it regards language as a defined lexico-grammatical system. Only by making replication activities the basis of the methodology can more creative theories of learning and richer descriptions of language be incorporated. A possible replication methodology contains seven components: student performance (carrying out a task using the target language), observation, teacher input, student analysis of native speaker text, rehearsal, students' review of their performance, and some minimal practice of target language forms. The components can be combined in many ways, and they can involve written and spoken language, but they should be used only in conditions promoting accurate production. (MSE)

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Theory and Methodology: Do we do what we are knowing?

J.D. WILLIS

Introduction

Some years ago there were many teacher trainers who offered an almost instant criterion for the success or otherwise of a language lesson. Success was inversely proportional to the amount of "teacher talking time". The more time the teacher talked, it was argued, the less time the students talked. The less time the students talked the less they learned. There was therefore a close relationship between the amount of teacher talking time and the amount of learning that went on in a lesson. Teacher talk was definitely a very bad thing. At one well known and very influential language school in London they even developed a complicated sign language which teachers could use to nominate, prompt, correct and admonish students without uttering so much as a word. The teacher began to look rather like one of those men on the race course or in the stock exchange who signal back to let the bookie or broker know how the market is moving.

In *The Natural Approach* published last year, Krashen and Terrell tell us that

According to the Input hypothesis speaking is not absolutely essential for language acquisition. We acquire from what we hear (or read) and understand, not from what we say. The Input hypothesis claims that the best way to teach speaking is to focus on listening (and reading) and spoken fluency will emerge on its own. For foreign language teaching, in situations where there is no vital need for early communication we can allow speaking to emerge in its own time.

For Krashen and Terrell then teacher talk is a very good thing. They would be worried to see a classroom, particularly in the early stages of learning, in which most of the talking was not done by the teacher. They would certainly argue that by minimising teacher talk-

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ing time we would simply be minimising student exposure to valuable language input and thereby preventing the student from acquiring language. I myself have a good deal of sympathy for the Krashen view and very little time for those who would gag the teacher. But whichever point of view is taken as being "correct" there can be no doubt that it will lead to classroom practice which, according to the opposing view, is likely to be extremely unproductive. This prompts the question "How well-founded is our current teaching methodology?" If our methodology rests on false premises then we are certainly wasting a good deal of valuable classroom time and perhaps engaging students in a good deal of unproductive drudgery. With this in mind I would like to look at a number of assumptions which seem to underpin our current practice and which are, I believe, very much open to challenge. I shall then ask the question "What kind of methodology would be implied if we were to deny these assumptions and operate according to quite contrary premises?"

Theories of Learning

We have no comprehensive theory of language learning. We should, however, base our teaching on a coherent theory, and one which is not contradicted by experience and experimental evidence. I would suggest that most existing language learning programmes and coursebooks are based on the following premises, among others:

(1) Language learning is an additive process. The learner's system develops as he gradually increases the stock of language patterns he can produce and understand — today the present progressive, next month the third conditional and next year the Cambridge Proficiency Examination.

(2) If learning "item" are ordered in a logical fashion according to a grammatical description of the language, learners will process and organise these items according to a similar logic.

(3) What is learned in the classroom will, with minor adjustments, be applied outside the classroom.

(4) Syntax must be acquired before discourse. The learner must acquire a sound grammar at the rank of sentence before he can seriously be expected to engage in any form of genuine communication.

(5) It is counter-productive to encourage the learner to operate independently. Unless input and output are controlled the learner

will develop an anarchic system which has only occasional resemblances to the target system.

There can be no doubt that all of these premises are open to serious challenge. Indeed they are all challenged in the literature. Interlanguage theory contradicts (1) and (2) Studies in the order of acquisition of morphemes contradict (3) Studies of language acquisition outside the formal classroom setting contradict (4) and (5), as indeed does Krashen's acquisition theory. What is much more worrying however is that all of these assumptions are seriously challenged by our experience in the classroom, by our experience as teachers. We know from countless bitter experiences that it is simply not true that what is "learned" in the classroom will be applied outside (3). How many times have you heard yourself or one of your colleagues say "But I taught them that last week!". How many times have you known students produce some pattern faultlessly in the controlled classroom environment only to produce something quite different as soon as the control is removed? We also know from experience that the learner's model does not, as (2) would have us believe, develop neatly in line with the input the learner is exposed to. The relationship between input and intake is much more complicated than that. Take for example subject-verb concord marked by the terminal "s" of the third person singular of the present simple tense. This is a very simple rule easily demonstrated and explained. It is one that the learner is exposed to very early in the learning process and yet learners even at an advanced level constantly produce the forms "He work", "She speak" and so on. There is no time to explore this in detail here but I believe that the other premises are equally open to doubt if we examine our experience critically and relate it to underlying assumptions instead of simply taking those assumptions as inviolate.

Language Description

It is a commonplace nowadays that there is much more to learning a language than simply acquiring its grammar. Yet most approaches are still based on the assumption that:

- (1) The object of study is a lexico-grammatical system.

This is reinforced by the way students are usually assessed, a procedure which seems to imply that:

- (2) One's ability to use a language for effective communication

is directly proportional to the number of grammatical patterns one can cite accurately.

OR

One's ability to use a language for effective communication is inversely proportional to the number of ungrammatical sentences one produces.

When it is presented as baldly as this one's immediate reaction is to deny that one's practice reflects such a naive view of language. Again I would ask you to examine your practice critically and honestly and see what view of language it truly reflects.

One could go on to list other views of doubtful validity which seem to inform our practice. I will list only one more:

(3) There is a defined target variety of the language which is superior to all others, and it is this variety that is to be learned. As a consequence of this any feature of any other variety must be suppressed.

This is a necessary premise if our teaching is to be prescriptive in the way implied in (1) and (2). It is reflected in a belief in the primacy of the academic grammar over current practice and in the teacher's constant assertion "Yes but...it's better to say it this way".

Current Methodology

There is a well established three stage methodological cycle. The stages are:

- Presentation
- Practice
- Production

The inculcation of this cycle and its application lie at the heart of many teacher training programmes.

It seems reasonable, if a little naive, to ask what it is that is to be assiduously presented, practised and produced. The answer is usually a learning "item" of some kind — a structural pattern or the realisation of some communicative function. Substantive realisations of these abstract entities are to be "presented" to the learner so that he becomes familiar with them. He is then required to practise manipulating similar realisations, and finally to "produce" these and other realisations in a way that appears to be spontaneous. These three stages might be described crudely and unsympathetically as:

- Presentation:— Listen to what I say.

- Practice:— Now you say it.
- Production:— Now say it again without my telling you to.

This crude description illustrates dramatically that this PPP methodology rests ultimately on the premises I have outlined and challenged above. It believes that language learning is additive and is teacher-dependent and materials dependent in a very direct way. The very terminology betrays a belief that language can be "presented", which implies that there is a defined lexico-grammatical system which is revealed to the learner piece by piece. Fortunately teachers humanise this methodology. They digress; they forget themselves and contextualise the process in language that the students are not supposed to know; as human-beings and compulsive communicators they cannot prevent themselves from socialising with their students in the target language. What Krashen and Terrel argue in *The Natural Approach*, and what I would argue here, is that meaningful talk by teacher and students should be central to the learning process not peripheral, that we should promote meaningful interaction from the very beginning of language learning instead of regarding it as a useful classroom bonus which may or may not happen later on.

Language Use in the Classroom

I have often proposed, as, for example, in my RELC paper last year, that language activities in the classroom can usefully be regarded as falling into three categories.

(1) *Citation*. Often we produce samples of the language as citation forms. That is to say we produce them not with the intention of encoding meanings but rather with the intention of exemplifying the language system. When the teacher asks students to listen and repeat or to manipulate the language in some structural way he is inviting them to indulge in a citation activity. The success or otherwise of this activity will be judged according to whether or not the student produces accurately the required forms of the language.

(2) *Simulation*. Here again the focus is on accuracy, on the forms of the language. In simulation activities, however, there is an appearance of communication. Perhaps the clearest example of a simulation activity is when, at the Production stage of a lesson we have a role playing activity. Students are required to engage in an activity which involves the appearance of buying and selling for

example. But because of the very nature of the PPP methodology, students know that the primary function of this activity is to *allow* them to demonstrate that they have mastered the distinction between mass and count nouns together with some of their grammatical markers; or to show that they can produce certain forms of request. Very often the composition lesson is an exercise in simulation. Students write a composition not to inform or entertain a target audience, but simply to demonstrate their command of the target language. It is this that so often makes composition such a difficult task. It is not easy to produce prose for no apparent purpose and for no apparent audience.

(3) *Replication*. I define as replication activities those activities which have a definite non-linguistic outcome, so that the focus of the activity is the outcome and the students success or failure in the activity is judged in terms of his success or failure in his attempt to achieve that outcome. The most common examples of replication activities are games playing and problem solving. These activities involve genuine language use in that language is deployed to achieve a purpose, an outcome. I label such activities "replication" because although they are quite different from the sort of things students are required to do outside the classroom they replicate the features and conditions of communication outside the classroom. Jigsaw listening and reading activities are good examples of this. Students are placed in a situation where they really need to exchange information with one another in order to complete a task. They will need to check what has been said, ask for and provide feedback, offer an evaluation of the information they receive and many of the other things that occur spontaneously in discourse outside the classroom.

Now I would argue that any methodology which relies primarily on citation and simulation activities is one which regards learning as additive, predictable and controlled, and which regards language as a defined lexico-grammatical system. Only by making replication activities the basis of our methodology can we take account of more creative theories of learning and richer descriptions of language.

Replication Methodology

I would like now to outline a possible replication methodology. The kind of student I have in mind is the adult remedial beginner, although I do not care much for the term "remedial". In very many

countries students of this kind are potentially the largest adult group — students who have been through the formal education system, including several years of tuition in a foreign language, but who now find that if they are to master that foreign language they have to begin again at a very elementary level. With these learners in mind I would propose a methodology with seven components:

The components would be as follows:

(1) *Student Performance*. This would be a replication activity. Students will be required to carry out a task or play a game using the target language.

(2) *Observation*. Students will observe on video or audio-cassette native speakers of the target language attempting the same tasks or games as they themselves have been engaged in.

(3) *Teacher Input*. The teacher models the target language. This is not done as a citation activity but as part of the process of preparing the students for a task or of reviewing with them their approach to and performance of a task.

(4) *Analysis*. Students will be required to analyse one or more of the features of the native speaker text they have observed.

(5) *Rehearsal*. Students will prepare to report back on their performance of the task. They will comment on what strategies they have used, how successful they have been, and so on.

(6) *Report/Review*. Students will report on their performance of a task.

(7) *Citation*. Students will practise forms of the target language. This is not seen as a part of the learning process, and certainly not as a necessary part. It is our experience, however, that for many students this stage is psychologically necessary. This may simply be a reflection of their previous language learning experience, but, whatever the reason, we see no point in needlessly frustrating student expectations. It is to be hoped, however, that these citation activities will be kept to a minimum.

These components can, as we shall see, be combined in an endless variety of ways. We have no wish to be pointlessly prescriptive as to the shape of a lesson. We wish simply to ensure that the events which take place in the language classroom reflect sound theoretical principles.

It should be emphasised, however, that replication methodology is not simply concerned with the crude and possibly highly in-

accurate performance. The components I have outlined are intended to create the conditions for accurate production. The methodology attempts to do this, however, not by the teacher insisting pedantically on a need for accuracy which may seem utterly irrelevant to the students, but rather by creating conditions in which the students themselves wish to produce accurate English.

The work of Labov (1970, 1972) suggests very strongly that there are communicative circumstances in which we are on our best behaviour and try to produce what we believe to be the prestige variety of the language. There are also more relaxed circumstances in which we are much more concerned with the immediacy and the social content of a message than how its form relates to some prestige variety. I would suggest that Labov's findings are no less relevant to the language classroom than to the streets and offices of New York, where his research was carried out.

When working with a small group of classmates in an attempt to solve a problem students are unlikely to be too much concerned with the formal aspects of the language they produce. The circumstances of this communication are:

Private:— carried out among a small group of peers who are well known to each other.

Spontaneous:— participants are operating in real time. They are composing their messages even as they produce them.

Ephemeral:— there is no record of the language produced.

Given this the demands of the task will take precedence over any desire to conform to prestige norms.

Things are likely to be quite different in the *Report/Review* component however. Here the circumstances of communication are:

Public:— there is no longer the comfort of being enclosed in a small group of peers. Teacher is listening. Classrooms are *public* places.

Rehearsed:— the students have been given time to prepare what they have to say. They are no longer operating in real time.

Permanent:— the teacher is listening carefully and taking note of what is said for future reference.

In these circumstances students are likely to be very much concerned with the form of the message and with conformity to prestige norms. This recognition of the differing communicative demands of different situations is part of our behaviour as communicating social animals. It is something that comes naturally whether the code

norms we are concerned with are English, Malay, Mandarin or Tamil.

Now if we are going to place students in circumstances which demand formal accuracy we should help prepare them for these demands. This is the function of the *Rehearsal* component. While students are preparing their reports the teacher will help them. This will include help with formal accuracy — in other words correction. It is likely that if correction is helping students to achieve something they themselves are motivated to achieve, that is a high degree of sociolinguistically appropriate formal accuracy, then it is likely that this correction will be welcome.

If, on the other hand, formal accuracy is not seen by the students as sociolinguistically appropriate, when, for example, their attention is engaged in the solution of a problem in small groups, then teacher correction and insistence on accuracy is seen by the student as meddlesome and pedantic. It is neither welcome nor useful.

My conclusion is that, at any stage of the lesson students should produce the language that seems appropriate to them and that when this calls for formal accuracy they should be helped to achieve this, but when formal accuracy is a minor consideration it should be treated as such. If I am asked, in the case of a society like Singapore, where an indigenous variety of English as a second language exists, whether this variety of English should be accepted in the classroom I would reply that it must be accepted in circumstances where it is appropriate. To deny this is to deny something that our students as communicating social animals know to be true of language and language use.

I would like to emphasise my basic point however. Just as there are occasions when the acceptance of some standard norms or, if you like, occasions when formal accuracy is not a priority so there are times when formal accuracy is very much a priority. It is a mistake, though a very common one I'm afraid, to think that communication is simply a matter of moving information or social functions around, and that this can be done by aiming at much less than a prestige variety of the target language. On the contrary, sometimes an essential part of the message is:

I recognise that you are my teacher, and I respect you. I recognise that the classroom is a public place and I wish to

acknowledge this. I want you to realise that what I am offering you is a carefully constructed message, not something composed in haste. I am giving the form of the message the care and attention demanded by the circumstances in which communication is taking place.

Just as we signal that we are angry by raising the pitch and volume of our voices, so we signal these complex sociolinguistic messages by the variety of the language we attempt to produce. And just as when we are angry we automatically signal this by vocal features, so we automatically signal social messages, not because we simply want to produce accurate forms, but because we want by producing accurate forms to acknowledge the social situation in which we find ourselves.

Ultimately, therefore, the opposition between accuracy and fluency that is often made is a false opposition, since there are occasions when both accuracy and fluency are called for and are sought by the learner. The job of the language teacher, I suggest is to help the learner to do through the medium of the target language what the learner wants to do — not to insist on accuracy for accuracy's sake but to put the learner in a situation where he himself will strive for accuracy because he knows that the communicative situation demands it.

In the situation that exists in Singapore, where English is a second rather than a foreign language, the job of the teacher is not to teach a whole new language. It is to help the student to extend his range towards an acrolectal target. If this is the case then we have an invaluable starting point — the student already speaks a variety of English. We should capitalise on this and help him to define the relationship between his English and the target variety. To ignore the fact that Singaporean students are daily users of English and to reject their English as irrelevant to the business of acquiring a standard form seems to me to be incredibly shortsighted. To deny and denigrate a student's variety of English when used in a situation in which he knows it to be appropriate is to threaten the student, his family, his neighbourhood and his whole social background. It is an intolerably threatening line to take, and hardly one that is likely to promote learning.

An Example of Replication Methodology

There is a well-known language game called "Spot the Difference". In this game students work in pairs. Each pair is given two pictures. The pictures are very similar but differ in one or two particular ways. Students are asked to identify the ways in which the pictures differ. Let us take this activity as the basis for a teaching cycle, and look at what the component parts of that cycle might be.

(1) Teacher explains the rules of the game. This will involve a good deal of teacher input. It may take the form of a dummy run of the game in which the teacher shows two pictures on OHP leads students through the process of spotting. For example, the teacher might say "What about the man in the middle of the picture, the man in the checked shirt? Look at his trousers." This may prompt a student to say "One picture have patch" or something of this sort. The teacher will then say "Good. In one picture the man has a patch on his trousers." This is again teacher input, but this time it has the effect of correcting the student utterance — not overtly by pointing out that he has gone wrong, but by using what is often called "caretaker" language, the kind of language that mothers use in conversation with children who are still acquiring the basic forms of the language, or that a native speaker might use quite naturally in conversation with a foreigner who has a very limited command of the language being used. The features of caretaker language are a good deal of paraphrase and repetition of learner utterances by the caretaker. It is a natural but unobtrusive teaching device.

This procedure will go on for some time. During this the learners are constantly exposed to target forms of the language in a natural and meaningful context.

(2) Students play the game in pairs with another set of pictures. Each student can see only one picture so they have to communicate to one another the contents of their picture in order to identify as many differences as possible. This stage is largely student performance but there will be teacher input when called for — that is to say when students call on the teacher for help with the task. The teacher's role here is to provide the students with the help they need in order to complete the task, language input, although vitally important, it incidental. For the most part the language used by students at this stage will be their own variety, the language they feel comfortable with, the language that comes naturally.

(3) Having identified a number of differences the students prepare to report back to the class on what they have found. This is a rehearsal stage. The students are preparing to report their private experience to the class as a whole. They know that their report must be in standard English, and this is what they are preparing for. At this stage the teacher should be busy monitoring what pairs of students are preparing. It is at this stage that students are likely to welcome correction from the teacher.

(4) Students report back what they have found. This is a report/review stage in which students attempt to produce standard forms. There is a good deal of teacher input and caretaker talk as teacher leads the discourse and reformulates unsatisfactory utterances. Both students and teacher are concerned to combine fluency with accuracy.

(5) Students listen to a recording in which native speakers perform the same task that they themselves have just performed. They are asked to listen carefully and count how many differences the native speakers find. This is an observation stage in which students observe how fluent speakers of the target language tackle a communication problem. It is in fact further input.

(6) Students are asked to analyse one feature of the observed text. They may be asked to pick out all the phrases that describe people; or they may be asked to pick out all the phrases that describe the location of people and things. This of course is the analysis stage. Students are thinking consciously about the language and about how form relates to meaning in a natural context.

(7) Students may do some intensive citation work on the output of their analysis. As I have said I believe that this stage is more for student satisfaction than for genuine learning, but it is nonetheless important, students who are insecure will not learn efficiently.

This particular cycle has seven stages, each one realised by one of the components described earlier. I would not want to be dogmatic about the ordering of these components, except to suggest that the citation come last. If citation comes first there is a real danger that students see the rest of the cycle as an opportunity to repeat the citation forms as often as possible, rather than as being concerned with performing a task through the meaningful use of language. Nor is it necessary that there be seven stages. In the cycle outlined we could add a stage which involved students writing down

at an interim stage, the differences they had observed. This could then have been reviewed before students continued the task orally. This would have given us a nine stage cycle. I believe that this versatility is an important feature of the methodology.

Varying the Activities

The proposed methodology can be applied to tasks which involve written as well as spoken English. It can be used with elementary, intermediate or advanced students. It can be used to adapt materials designed according to structural criteria so that they can be taught communicatively.